

INTERVIEW WITH CHARLES A. HUGHLETT
BY MARK MADISON MAY 1, 2004
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DR. MADISON: Can you give us your full name and it's spelling please?

MR. HUGHLETT: I'm Art Hughlett, that's spelled H-U-G-H-L-E-T-T. My official signature is Charles A. Hughlett but I've gone by my middle name, Arthur, all of my life except when I was in the military or working for the government.

DR. MADISON: Tell us about your career with FWS, how did you get started?

MR. HUGHLETT: After I had served in World War II, I went back to college and got a degree in Forestry from Michigan State. I also got a degree in Wildlife Management from the University of Wisconsin. Then came the big question of where do I find a job. It just happened at that time that the FWS was short twelve or thirteen trainee type positions. I was fortunate enough to be picked as one of the few who got hired by the federal Fish and Wildlife Service. I went had been going to school at University of Wisconsin in Madison and then I went to Ballentine, Nebraska, which was my first assignment with FWS. I was what we later called a Refuge Manager Trainee. Originally it was called a Junior Refuge Manager. I served under a man named Alistair D. Campbell. He was from the old school which thought that people should be kept off of wildlife refuge because they caused nothing but trouble. I learned how to deal with angry fishermen, especially those who had gone into places on the refuge where they weren't supposed to be. As a consequence they got stuck in the mud and were not a bit shy about telling how they felt about the government not keeping suitable roads for fisherman. This was on a NWR that was designed primarily for puddle ducks; mallards, gadwall, blue winged teal, green winged teal, that group of birds. Ballentine was a real fine producer of those species; especially blue winged teal and mallards. They were the favored species at that time.

After I had served at Ballentine Refuge for about two and a half years I was transferred to Lake Andes in southern South Dakota. I was green as grass about public relations. I did my best in spite of my lack of knowledge or lack of guidelines. I only lasted a year there. Then I was transferred to the Horicon Refuge in Wisconsin. This was right close to my original home and my wife's original home.

DR. MADISON: Where are you from?

MR. HUGHLETT: I'm from Waukesha, Wisconsin and my wife is from Ft. Atkinson.

DR. MADISON: I'm from Wausau, Wisconsin!

MR. HUGHLETT: I really enjoyed my time on Horicon Refuge. I that time we, the FWS were trying our best to keep birds out of what was known as the slaughterhouse in southern Illinois. We concentrated on providing food on Horicon Refuge that would be

attractive to Canada Geese primarily and to any other birds that happened to find that particular and wonderful supply of food. I was at Horicon for about three years and was transferred to the Chautauqua Refuge in central Illinois. My oldest child, our daughter Laurel started school at a little country school called Kekosky. You have to be German and have a mouth full of beer in order to pronounce that right! After serving my time at Chautauqua, I was transferred out to Lacreek Refuge in southern South Dakota. This little refuge is about ten thousand acres or so, but it's highly productive. Everything that we did on the refuge to attract wildlife paid off. I had a wonderful time. By that time the kids, by that time we had two, they loved living there. We brought in a bunch of trumpeter swan singlets from Red Rocks Lakes Refuge in Montana and we were highly successful. After we learned that we had to control the horned owl population because they were preying on the singlets. These rascals were up to about twelve pounds at that time and with a four and a half or five foot wingspread. You'd think that they could defend themselves against the horned owl but they were not successful in doing that. They needed some help. Although I was Vice-President of the South Dakota Ornithologists Union, we didn't tell the folks off of the refuge that we were doing some selective control on great horned owls. As it turned out, the transplant of young birds from Red Rocks Lakes Refuge to Lacreek Refuge was a tremendous success. The birds nested and paired up at an earlier stage than they normally did in Montana. We always said that this was because we had such wonderful, clean water and clean air in South Dakota. Some of the birds nested when they were three, going on four years of age, which was at least a year earlier than when they were nesting in Montana. It always grieved me when somebody would shoot a trumpeter swan instead of a tundra swan. I did my best to make them pay for it. Law Enforcement was a part of my job at every refuge I was on. I didn't necessarily like it, but it was part of the job, a necessity. I did my best to make people realize that they were not going to be able to get away with doing things on the refuge that were adverse to the relationship in that part of the country.

I was then transferred to the Seney Refuge on the upper peninsula of Michigan. This was one of those areas where just on a scenic basis; it was justified to be protected by the government. We had great numbers of pine trees there and all manner of conifers that provided good habitat for everything from a northern gyrfalcon to the blue winged teal and mallards that I was familiar with in the west. After the period of time at Lacreek and seeing the transplant of the trumpeter swan singlets looked like it was going to be a success.... Transferred down to the regional office as a Planning Specialist. I did my best to follow the guidelines that I had learned while I was in the military about how you plan for every eventuality that could happen and hope that none of them did. I made great inroads into the numbers of master plans that were available in the region. I seemed to have a knack for being able to pull out things that were great importance from things that were of lesser importance. I had a chance to go to Washington on an extended training program that lasted about six or seven months. When I came through with that I thought that it wouldn't probably be a very arduous task if somebody suggested that I might go in to Washington and work there at some time. I had discovered with that long training assignment that people were doing things that I wanted to be a part of, and that I could contribute to. That's what I did. I was transferred into the Washington office. My children found that country schools still existed. My daughter especially liked living on

the Refuge because she had her own horse. My son had a little pony. How much better can it get? I enjoyed that time in the Washington office especially because I ran in to some of the people that I had been in college with. They were looking for jobs and here I was with several years of experience and had the job in my pocket. I didn't look down my nose at anybody's effort but I was very happy that I had a job, and really loved what I was doing.

A lot of the structures and water control structures on the refuge at Lacreek in South Dakota were leftover work projects from CCC and WPA, which were make-work jobs but they taught people skills that were very valuable later on when we got into a war. I found that all of that field experience was valuable to the FWS so I ended up being able to fill in for people who were scheduled to make presentations of one kind or another. These were ones that especially had to do with wildlife.

I enjoyed working with the Park Service and the Forest Service and BLM, all of whom had a different slant as to what was important. We were able to reach an accommodation with each one of those agencies that was amenable to what we were there for primarily. This was to protect wildlife habitat. After a suitable period of time in the Washington office, somebody told me it was six years but it went so fast that I can hardly believe that, I was transferred to Minneapolis as the Deputy Regional Director. I spent ten years there in that position. I liked that job probably best of all.

DR. MADISON: What years were those?

MR. HUGHLETT: 1971 to 1981, I think it was.

DR. MADISON: Those were interesting years to be a Deputy Regional Director. What were some of the issues that came up that you dealt with in Minneapolis?

MR. HUGHLETT: Well, this was the time when the powers that be had decided that we would better service the wildlife and it's habitat by having Area offices. Not everybody thought that this was the way to go. I was one of them that raised all of the objections that I could think of, and that were valid. Then, since the boss was still adamant that he wanted to make some changes, I decided that I'd better get in line with him and help him. That was a big transformation from being a line outfit with headquarters in the Washington office and regional offices really not having much power to the reversal to where the Regional offices had just about as much power as before but the area offices which were usually made up of two to three states, had quite a bit of freedom to experiment or to follow proven wildlife management practices. It was fine for the area managers, but it took a lot of autonomy away from the staff in the Washington office. I think that was the big problem that happened during my time with the FWS.

DR. MADISON: When were you born? I should have asked you that earlier!

MR. HUGHLETT: 1922. September 11, 1922. I didn't cause all of it.

DR. MADISON: Yes, but you've shared that date! You had a long career in the service from after World War II to 1981, how did it change during your years in? What changes did you notice?

MR. HUGHLETT: One of the things that was most pleasing to me was that the general public was beginning to value wildlife and its habitat. There were some times when I'd just shake my head wondering if they'd ever learn not to do certain things. Of course when you are right down close to where the mud is you're more sensitive that if you are isolated somewhere.

DR. MADISON: Your last year was under James Watt, is that right? Who was the Director then, was it Frank Dunkle?

MR. HUGHLETT: No, Lynn Greenwalt came in just about the time that I was going out to Minneapolis. [Taking a sip of water] That's good water; Deer Park, right out of the faucet!

DR. MADISON: Are there any other interesting things that you'd like to share while we have you here for a few more minutes?

MR. HUGHLETT: Let me tell you, you don't need to expand on this if you don't want to; but I think that all of my time with the FWS I was involved with intelligent, well educated people who had a work ethic that was reflective of the Scandinavian heritage. It was quite a shock to go from that kind of work ethic to one where people just didn't give a damn if they did anything. I remember I was in the Regional Office in Minneapolis when we had a mini recession. The Personnel Officer there was "Goodie" Larson. [Goodman Larson] He was a good Personnel Officer. He tried to keep all of us going in the direction of equal opportunity and tried to match that up with what the Secretary of the Interior and the Director thought was important. It was walking a tightrope for a while in that I couldn't do some of the things that I wanted to see done. There were a few things that I know were being done that I couldn't condone if I'd known them officially. When you get to the point where you have to conceal something... and this I don't want to see.... I got to the point where I had to sign off as the DRD on land acquisition and personnel actions. There were times when I knew darn well that the person who was selected was not the best qualified. That was hard to take because my whole philosophy is based on being ethical and making sure that everything which is presented for the boss's signature has been researched so that there weren't any surprises and were such that everybody could go along with whatever decision had been made. If the Director made a change, that was his prerogative. But I didn't want to put anything on Jack Hemphill's desk that would make him turn red around the gills and shoot sparks off of his eyes. He has a short temper when he is really concerned about something. I learned a lot from him because I learned how to get along with the Corps of Engineers. That was a major step in itself. I learned how to use the friends that we had in the Audubon Society and the whole raft of conservation groups.

It's a real blessing to me, to be able to come back to the service environment that we have here. I'm so pleased that we've found a way to work closely with some influential people. I'd gotten really concerned about some of the things that were happening and then I came here and saw what could happen by a partnership. I had a dream this morning that involved Congressman Dingle from Michigan. He was advocating a facility like this in the state of Michigan primarily based on fisheries. When I woke up from that, I thought, 'My God, I'm even dreaming about this stuff!'

DR. MADISON: Had you met Dingle when you were working?

MR. HUGHLETT: Yes.

DR. MADISON: I'm curious, what was he like? You met Dingle, Sr. right?

MR. HUGHLETT: Right.

DR. MADISON: His son is coming out here. We are going to dedicate a Hero's plaque to Dingle, Sr. this summer. His son is coming in September. The plaque is to recognize the Dingle-Johnson Act and all of his work for conservation. What were your interactions with him like?

MR. HUGHLETT: Everything that John Dingle proposed was based on good, rational thinking. If it was good for the state of Michigan, then it should have been good for the whole country. John was not out for anything for himself. He was pretty patient with some of us who got carried away with our defense of wildlife. He was instrumental in getting a small refuge along the Detroit River. I remember coming back from a trip with the Coast Guard in a big old military scow of one kind or another. The side of the boat was just thick with some kind of caustic that they had dumped in the river upstream. I was bubbling over with anger at things like that that happened. One of Dingle's staff people said, "Well, I wish Mr. Dingle was here and could hear you talk like that, just the way it is!" I said, "I can go wherever he is!" This young fellow said, "No, we'd better just let it drop!"

DR. MADISON: What did you work with the Congressman's office on? Was it primarily the Detroit Refuge?

MR. HUGHLETT: Yeah. There are so many things that are the same about refuges and yet there are so many things that are different. Every refuge has its own personality. That's a reflection of the supervision that the person gets and that they pay heed to. John Dingle was doing whatever he could behind the scenes to make sure that the foul smelling stuff and the caustic stuff got cleaning up so people were not afraid to get into the river. Some of that stuff would just about take your fingernails off!

DR. MADISON: Thank you very much Art, this was wonderful. I really appreciate it!